Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh
New Series Volume 15 Number 5 June 2018

FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 24th June 2018: Hyderabad Central University, 6.30AM. Meeting point: Opp. Mangatrai Pearls, Punjagutta, 6.00AM.

A relatively under-explored location, the Hyderabad Central University campus offers good birding possibilities. Birds like the Drongo Cuckoo have been reported from this location earlier. Overall, the birding should be quite interesting. This will be a half-day trip. Carry snacks and water as usual. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Ms Surekha Aitabathula (99490-38532).

INDOOR MEETING: Thursday, 28th June 2018, 6.00PM: TALK BY DR. RAJANI VAKKALANKA: CITIZENS' EFFORTS TO BRING BACK SPARROWS

Sparrows were a part of every household some years back. Now they are hardly seen. Destruction caused to biodiversity manifests itself through a decline in sparrow population. The talk will focus on the observations and the efforts of the speaker to bring back sparrows through citizens' participation.

Dr Rajini Vakkalanka is the founder of "Maahini - People for Mother Earth". A doctor by education, she has conducted many environment education campaigns for school children. Her work and efforts for bird and sparrow conservation has inspired citizens to support the cause.

Trip Report – ICRISAT, February 25, 2018

Ajit Kumar Mahendra

Red-naped Ibis (Photo: Barnali Chaudhuri)

Birding at the International Crop Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) has always been a pleasurable experience for several reasons. It is located in the outskirts of the city and can be reached comfortably, more so on a Sunday morning. There is greenery everywhere with no pollution – air or sound – and it is immaculately clean and boasts of an abundance of avian species, both terrestrial and aquatic. While we see birds everywhere on the campus, there are 3 or 4 lakes that are the best sites to park oneself to feast on nature's bounty.

As usual, we all assembled at the entrance of the campus. After finishing the security formalities and saying hello to all, members and guests, we boarded the ICRISAT bus with our backpacks. All age groups were represented from 'single digiters' to yours faithfully at 70+, and all were excited at the prospect of birding in salubrious surroundings. Aasheesh perched himself on the navigator's seat in the front and looked prim and young in his shorts and shirt.

Baya Weaver (Photo: Barnali Chaudhuri)

Being spring time, several trees were in full bloom, the most attractive being *Tabebuia Argentea* with its spectacular yellow blooms. Our first stop on this pleasant morning was a pond with lots of reeds, an ideal setting for Baya Weavers (*Ploceus philippinus*), and we were richly rewarded. Several of them were fluttering around.

Black-rumped Flameback (Photo: Barnali Chaudhuri)

On the trees around, we could spot a pair of Black-rumped Flamebacks (*Dinopium benghalense*), Indian Golden Oriole (*Oriolus oriolus*), Spotted Owlet (*Athene brama*) and Rosy Starlings (*Pastor roseus*).

Indian Golden Oriole (Photo: Barnali Chaudhuri)

Little Egrets (*Egretta garzetta*), the ubiquitous Indian Pond Herons (*Ardeola grayii*) and Eurasian Coots (*Fulica atra*) were spotted in the pond or in the vegetation on the banks. A lonely Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*) was seen in the tall grass on the water's edge. Barn Swallows (*Hirundo rustica*) and White-throated Kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*) on *Tacoma Stans* branches with their purple flowers were a photographer's delight.

Barn Swallow (Photo: Barnali Chaudhuri)

Indian Peafowl (Photo: Barnali Chaudhuri)

Indian Peafowls (*Pavo cristatus*) were making shrill calls and our deft shutterbugs captured some breathtaking shots of them. Grey Francolins (*Francolinus pondicerianus*) marked their presence through their distinct call but eluded our sight.

Bar-headed Goose and Darter (Photo: Barnali Chaudhuri)

The largest tank was our second pit stop. A tree on the island in the middle of the lake had a nest with chicks in it. We spotted 4-5 Bar-headed Geese (*Anser indicus*), a few Pelicans, Cormorants and a pair of Darters (*Anhinga melanogaster*) perched on some the branches jutting from the water. They made a pretty site as they craned their elegant necks. Being close to the shore they could be seen *sans* binoculars.

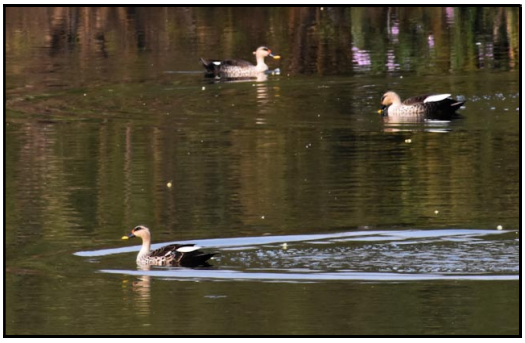
Spot-billed Pelican (Photo: Barnali Chaudhuri)

Darter (Photo: Ajit Kumar Mahendra)

A pergola provided excellent shade for us to relax and do birding at the same time. Most birders retired to the shade of the trees to do justice to the breakfast they had carried. Sharing made the culinary experience richer.

Purple Swamphen (Photo: Barnali Chaudhuri)

A fenced pond was our penultimate stop. Peeping through the fencing, we could see Little Egrets, Eurasian Coots, Purple Swamphen (*Porphyrio porphyrio*) and Indian Spot-billed Ducks (*Anas poecilorhyncha*).



Spot-billed Duck (Photo: Barnali Chaudhuri)

A pair of juvenile Bronze-winged Jacanas (*Metopidius indicus*) were foraging in the vegetation on the water's edge. A Eurasian Marsh Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*) landed on a boulder very close to the fence and we could hear the camera shutters whirring incessantly till it took to the wings.

Marsh Harrier (Photo: Ajit Kumar Mahendra)

The richest spot in terms of the number of avian species is the lake with 2 islands, which is always the last halt in our birding itinerary at ICRISAT. Spot-billed Pelicans (*Pelecanus philippensis*) perched on tree tops as Cormorants, drying their wings, perched on the water's edge.

Ruddy Shelduck (Photo: Barnali Chaudhuri)

Ruddy Shelducks (*Tadorna ferruginea*), Indian Spot-billed Ducks, Northern Shovellers (*Anas clypeata*), Garganey (*Anas querquedula*), Black-headed Ibis (*Threskiornis melanocephalus*), etc were spotted in large numbers. Members who had participated in the peafowl census reported many more species during their visit a month earlier.

Garganey (Photo: Barnali Chaudhuri)

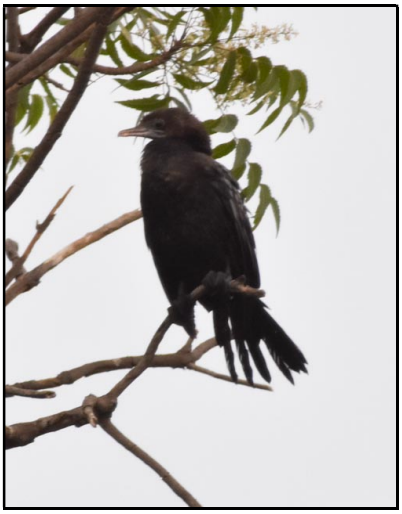
Black-headed Ibis with Cormorants (Photo: Barnali Chaudhuri)

While driving back towards the entrance, we suddenly heard shouts of 'stop, stop'. Some of our birders had spotted an Oriental Honey Buzzard (*Pernis ptilorhynchus*) perched on a tree. We had a ringside view of this not-so-common raptor before it flew away.

All parted quickly on reaching the gate, having spent the best part of Sunday in the lap of nature. These weekend trips are memorable not just for the excellent birding they offer but also for the excellent company that cuts across all age groups and diverse professions.

Purple Heron (Photo: Ajit Kumar Mahendra)

We had a continuous flow of snacks in the bus. No wonder I love to limp around in spite of my arthritis – for the sheer pleasure of birding and the wonderful company of fellow birders.



Little Cormorant (Photo: Barnali Chaudhuri)

Long-tailed Shrike (Photo: Barnali Chaudhuri)

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Trip Report – Rollapadu, September 2017

Text and Photos: Sita Susarla

Lesser Florican

The Great Indian Bustard (*Ardeotis nigriceps*) and the Lesser Florican (*Sypheotides indicus*) are the main attractions of Rollapadu Wildlife Sanctuary. Established in the year 1988 for the conservation of these two species, the park is the only habitat in Andhra Pradesh for these birds. Birders visit the sanctuary to see these two species and also the Montagu's Harrier (*Circus pygargus*) that visits the park in winters.

Having heard about the recent sightings of a Bustard and a Florican in the park, we set out from Hyderabad to see them and the other birds too. It being the month of September, the whole sanctuary was echoing with the calls of the Rain Quails (*Coturnix coromandelica*).

Black Buck

As we walked across the dry grassland we came across hundreds of Black Buck nibbling at the tall grass. The increase in the Black Buck population was supposed to be one of the reasons for the disappearance of the Bustard and Lesser Florican in the park, the other being cattle grazing. Together they reduced the grass cover which in turn led to reduction in the locusts and grasshoppers that serve as food for the Florican and the Bustard. The Montagu's Harrier too feeds on grasshoppers.

Lesser Florican

As we moved around the park, a guide offered to show us the Florican. We agreed instantly and were lucky to find it in the designated location. The Lesser Florican belongs to the bustard family and is endemic to the Indian subcontinent. Come monsoon, the males leap into the air in an elaborate courtship display. We watched these spectacular leaping displays for a long time.

With half the mission accomplished quite early, we began to look around for the Bustard. The guide however did not know of its presence in the park. Slightly disappointed we continued to bird by ourselves. The chirpy Indian Silverbills (*Euodice malabarica*) were everywhere and so were the Laughing Doves (*Stigmatopelia senegalensis*).

Red Collared Dove

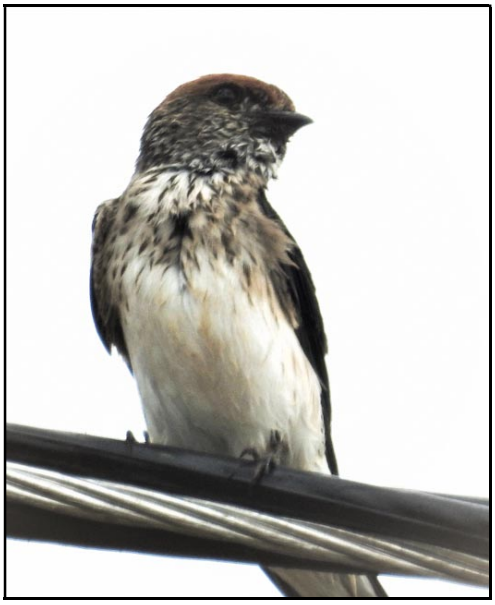
At one place we saw the Red Collared Dove (*Streptopelia tranquebarica*) and Eurasian Collared Dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*) foraging together on the ground – a beautiful sight. The Grey Francolins (*Francolinus pondicerianus*) were also present in large numbers. We climbed the watch tower to have a complete view of the park. It was a great sight.

Eurasian Collared Dove

After having lunch at a nearby hotel we rested at the forest guesthouse till about 3:30PM. Now it was cooler and we could see some activity around us. We sighted a Sirkeer Malkoha (*Taccocua leschenaultia*) preening its feathers. This was a lifer for us. Brown and rufous in color, it had a cherry red and yellow beak that was slightly hooked. Though a shy bird, we could watch it for quite some time and also take good pictures. A little later we stopped to look at the display of a Red-vented Bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*). As we looked around a brood of Bush Quails emerged from a nearby bush. We just had a glance at them before they disappeared.

Sirkeer Malkoha

From the park we now drove to the Alaganur Reservoir behind the sanctuary. Here we saw Streak-throated Swallows (*Petrochelidon fluvicola*) in plenty, a few River Terns (*Sterna aurantia*), one Asian Openbill (*Anastomus oscitans*), and a few Egrets and Herons. Though we could not see the Bustard and the Montagu's Harrier, we were more than happy to have seen the Florican. It was a dawn to dusk birding and we enjoyed every bit of it. The sanctuary is worth visiting any number of times given its bird activity.



Streak-throated Swallow

The complete list of birds is given below:

Sl. No.	Common Name	Sl. No.	Common Name
1	Lesser Whistling Duck	42	Indian Silverbill
2	Indian Spot-billed Duck	43	Little Swift
3	Indian Peafowl	44	Asian Palm Swift
4	Jungle/Rock Bush Quail	45	Eurasian Hoopoe
5	Grey Francolin	46	Indian Grey Hornbill
6	Baya Weaver	47	White-throated Kingfisher
7	Little Grebe	48	Pied Kingfisher
8	Asian Openbill	49	Green Bee-eater
9	Painted Stork	50	Blue-tailed Bee-eater
10	Little Cormorant	51	Indian Roller
11	Great Cormorant	52	Coppersmith Barbet
12	Oriental Darter	53	Rose-ringed Parakeet
13	Spot-billed Pelican	54	Bay-backed Shrike
14	Grey Heron	55	Black Drongo
15	Purple Heron	56	Rufous Treepie
16	Great Egret	57	House Crow
17	Little Egret	58	Large-billed Crow
18	Cattle Egret	59	Rufous-tailed Lark
19	Indian Pond Heron	60	Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark
20	Glossy Ibis	61	Red-rumped Swallow
21	Red-naped Ibis	62	Streak-throated Swallow
22	Eurasian Spoonbill	63	Red-vented Bulbul
23	Black-shouldered Kite	64	Zitting Cisticola
24	Shikra	65	Common Tailorbird
25	Black Kite	66	Grey-breasted Prinia
26	Lesser Florican	67	Jungle Prinia
27	White-breasted Waterhen	68	Ashy Prinia
28	Eurasian Coot	69	Plain Prinia
29	Black-winged Stilt	70	Common Babbler
30	Red-wattled Lapwing	71	Large Grey Babbler
31	River Tern	72	Yellow-billed Babbler
32	Blue Rock Pigeon	73	Indian Robin
33	Eurasian Collared Dove	74	Oriental Magpie Robin
34	Red Collared Dove	75	Pied Bushchat
35	Spotted Dove	76	Brahminy Starling
36	Laughing Dove	77	Purple Sunbird
37	Southern Coucal	78	Purple-rumped Sunbird
38	Sirkeer Malkoha	79	White-browed Wagtail
39	Asian Koel	80	Paddyfield Pipit
40	Grey-bellied Cuckoo	81	Tawny Pipit
41	Common Hawk Cuckoo		

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Bird of the Month

Text and Photo: Umesh Mani

Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*)

Whimbrel (Pulicat, December 24, 2017)

Order: Charadriiformes
Family: Scolopacidae
Genus: *Numenius*
Species: *N. phaeopus*
Size: 37-47 cm

Description & distribution: The Whimbrel is a large wader of the family Scolopacidae. It breeds across subarctic North America, Europe (as far south as Scotland) and Asia, and is among the most widespread of the curlews. It is a winter visitor to the coastal regions in Africa, South America, southern parts of North America, and south Asia up to Australasia.

The bird is overall greyish-brown, with a back and rump that are white (in *N. p. phaeopus* and *N. p. alboaxillaris*) or quite heavily streaked (in the other sub-species). Superficially similar to the Eurasian Curlew, it is, however, smaller in size, and the bill is long (though shorter and straighter than the Curlew's) and has a kink rather than a smooth curve. It has a central crown stripe and a strongly marked supercilium. The sexes are similar, with the adult female being bigger and having a slightly longer bill.

Seven sub-species are recognized: *N. p. islandicus* (found in Iceland, Ireland and Britain), the nominate *N. p. phaeopus* (Norway to south-central Siberia), *N. p. alboaxillaris* (western Kazakhstan to south-western Siberia), *N. p. rogachevae* (central Siberia), *N. p. variegatus* (north-eastern Siberia), *N. p. rufiventris* (Alaska and north-western Canada) and *N. p. hudsonicus*, also known as Hudsonian Curlew (Hudson Bay to north-eastern Canada).

Habitat & behaviour: Outside the breeding season, the Whimbrel is a highly gregarious species. It is usually seen on the edges of water-bodies like tidal flats, mangrove-lined creeks, lakes and *jheels*, flooded agricultural lands, and around cultivated areas, and feeds by probing the wet mud with its long bill for small invertebrates, crabs (especially fiddler crabs), molluscs and other similar prey off the surface. It also takes insects, especially butterflies like the Blue Tiger, and berries are an important part of their diet before migration. A skittish bird, it usually moves away on human approach. The call is a 7-9 syllabled rippling whistle *tetti-tetti-tetti-tet*, which is elongated into a trilling song, and may be heard clearly even during nocturnal migratory flights.

Nesting: The Whimbrel is highly territorial while nesting, and may even attack humans if approached too closely. It usually breeds between April and July. The nest is a shallow scrape on tundra or open moorland. The usual clutch consists of 3-5 buff-coloured eggs speckled with brown.

Local name: The Whimbrel is known as *'Chhota Gounch'* or *'Chhota gulinda'* in Hindi, '*Nani khalili*' in Gujarati, *'Kuthirai malai kottan'* (a name it shares with the Eurasian Curlew) in Tamil and *'Tetti kokku'* in Malayalam.

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Brief report : Red-vented Bulbul raiding nest of Common Tailorbird Hyderabad, May 2018

Text and Photos: Azam

Common Tailorbird nest

A few months back at my residence in Banjara Hills, I observed a Common Tailorbird (*Orthotomus sutorius*) building a nest by binding a fig leaf with soft cotton threads. The soft material that comprised the nest included cotton from our mattresses that had been kept out for sunning! Within a few days they had laid eggs and started incubating. A couple of days later we observed a pair of resident Red-vented Bulbuls (*Pycnonotus cafer*) start to build their nest. The initial structure was ready in a day or two and made out of neem twigs and coconut fibres from dry coconuts.

One day there was a lot of commotion in the garden. The Tailorbirds were in an agitated state, constantly giving out alarm calls. A few seconds later I saw a Bulbul emerge from the Tailorbird's nest with some material which it used to line its own nest. The Tailorbirds tried to drive away the Bulbuls who were not deterred and kept making trips to and fro. I tried placing some soft material in the path of the Bulbuls but they did not relent, and in the end the Tailorbird's nest was completely destroyed and the eggs lay on the ground. I think the attacks had started early in the morning and the damage had been done by the time we noticed what was happening.

What I found interesting was that the Bulbuls did not even try to drive away the Tailorbirds but ignored them completely and single-mindedly went for their nest.

The Bulbuls went on to raise two chicks – their 3rd successful family from the same spot – and moved on. I am not sure whether the Bulbuls were trying to eliminate competition. They kept ignoring the material that was readily available and chose what was in the Tailorbird's nest instead. Since then, they have had one more nesting in the same place but I have not seen any soft lining to their nest. They used husk and twigs.

I have also observed Tailorbird chicks in our garden subsequently – a positive sign that they are still nesting in the area.

Note: The above photo was taken from a safe distance and the birds were not disturbed.

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For Private Circulation Only
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